

Class Divisions Among Women¹

Michael Shalev

shalev@vms.huji.ac.il

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Women have both shared and divided interests. In the United States, this truism was forcefully brought home at the peak of second-wave feminism by African-American dissidents who criticized the movement's predominantly white and middle-class leaders and activists for imposing their own assumptions, values and interests. Since then, scholars working on gender have internalized the reality of pluralism among women, and today they often enshrine it in the concept of intersectionality between gender and other cleavages (Browne and Misra 2003; Glenn 1985; McCall 2005). As one indication of this, an online search of *Google Books* in August 2007 yielded nearly 600 titles that include all three of the words gender, race and class in their title! This paper focuses on the gender-class couplet. I argue that attending to potentially divisive class differences is essential for understanding the benefits and burdens for women of different ways of combining work and motherhood. Feminist perspectives on the intersection between class and gender have yielded important insights but have concentrated on how gender inequality contributes to class inequality and how class subordination oppresses women. Less commonly discussed is interaction between class and gender in the sense that the implications of gender are conditional on class (cf. Wright 2001). Here I highlight precisely this type of interaction, by exploring how gender norms and interests vary between women in different classes.

The context for this discussion is the political conditions for realizing Gornick and Meyers' (G&M) vision of a gender-egalitarian and family-friendly society. My substantive focus is on two of their most important proposals for federal government intervention: universal public childcare and paid parental leave. I seek to demonstrate, with respect to these reforms, that in the United States both women's normative orientations and their economic interests are divided along class lines. In relation to values, public opinion data show that the majority of women from all class backgrounds reject the male-breadwinner model of gender roles in the family. At the same time, the distribution of opinion reveals systematic differences in the ideals supported by women from different educational and occupational classes. G&M's proposals are most consistent with the orientations of relatively privileged women. I will go on to argue that there is an even clearer class division when it comes to the costs and benefits for women of different approaches to reconciling motherhood and paid employment. This discussion

relates to both the interests of women as childcare consumers, and the indirect effects of work/family policies on their labor market attainments.

When variations across classes in ideals and interests are juxtaposed, the result is ironic. Class differences in moral economy (norms) are inconsistent with class differences in political economy (the costs and benefits of policies intended to support maternal employment). While educated women in professional and managerial jobs appear to be the most favorable towards the dual earner/dual carer model, it is not in their economic interest for the state to take responsibility for making it happen. I infer that even though relatively privileged women may strongly support the goals underlying G&M's program, they are unlikely to mobilize their superior political capabilities in order to push this program forward. As a result, class differences and tensions among women are an unacknowledged barrier on the road to a dual-earner/dual-carer society.

The Moral Economy of Gender

If there are significant class differences in values and orientations towards work, the family and how best to balance these two spheres, then a "one size fits all" approach to work/family reconciliation may be inappropriate. Gornick and Meyers' ideal of a dual-earner/dual-carer society presumes that both caring for children and being employed outside the home are important to mothers, and that in order to reconcile conflicting demands it is preferable that fathers rather than mothers adjust by doing less paid work and taking on more domestic work. Many highly-educated, career-oriented American women probably share this view. But what if lower-class women do not aspire to, and cannot realistically expect, self-fulfilling careers;² and what if, in addition, they (and their husbands) value women's care responsibilities at home more highly than their paid work outside? In that case, G&M's policy package conflicts with these women's preferences, which would be better served by "familializing" interventions aimed at raising the income of male breadwinners or subsidizing mothers who stay at home with their children.

² Throughout this paper I use the terms "higher class" and "lower class" in a relative fashion, not as proper names for specific classes. My concern is with broad differences in economic advantage linked to either personal resources (i.e. education) or positions in production (i.e. occupations). In any event, data considerations make it necessary to take an eclectic approach to defining classes for empirical purposes.

There is a sizable survey-based literature on gender role ideologies. This literature addresses both the rise of egalitarianism over time and its variation across countries (for a recent contribution and references, see Sjoberg 2004). Analyzing ISSP data from 2002, Svallfors (2006) demonstrates the prevalence of class differences in orientations towards both family and work in diverse Western societies, including the United States. Examining variations in an index of support for women working outside of the home,³ and defining classes by occupation, Svallfors finds that in all the countries he studied, among both men and women "the working class consistently displays more conservative attitudes than the service class" (Svallfors 2006:112). Class differences were however lower in the United States and Britain than in Europe.⁴

The General Social Survey (GSS) is a frequently utilized source for quantitative research on gender role attitudes in the US (for an excellent illustration and literature survey, see Badgett, Davidson and Folbre 2002). However, research in this mode has not sought to explicitly identify class differences. A study by Harris and Firestone (1998) indirectly addressed this issue, finding that net of a wide range of other determinants education strongly affected an index of gender egalitarianism. However, no differences were detected between broad occupational groups.⁵ Making different methodological choices, I do find such differences. My analysis looks solely at class effects, viewed both as the resources that individuals bring to the labor market (education) and their locations in the division of labor (occupational groups). This is preferable to the standard procedure of testing the impact of multiple and partially overlapping socioeconomic attributes in an additive, over-specified regression model. In addition, rather than depending on statistical controls to cope with limited sample sizes, I have pooled GSS surveys for the whole of the latest available decade (1994-2004). This makes it possible to analyze only those

³ Svallfors' index includes questions that tap not only whether women's work is seen as legitimate in terms of the division of labor with their husbands, but also whether or not it is perceived as detrimental to their families and children.

⁴ With age and sex controlled, class gaps were lower by roughly half in Britain and the USA compared to Germany and Sweden (Svallfors 2006:Table 6.2).

⁵ Other studies have confirmed the importance of education, but without testing the effect of occupational class (Blee and Tickamyer 1995; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004).

respondents who represent the target audience of G&M's proposals: married women of prime working age living with their spouses and children.⁶

Turning now to the dependent variable, rather than potentially clouding the meaning of the attitudes analyzed by combining answers to different questions, I look at responses to a single but classic evocation of traditional gender roles: "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." The four alternative responses offered were very unevenly distributed in my sample. Conservative choices attracted only a minority: 8% "strongly agree" and 20% "agree". Egalitarian choices dominated: "disagree" (50%) and "strongly disagree" (22%). Even when the sample was segmented in various ways, a large bloc of respondents routinely chose the "disagree" option. In order to accentuate the remaining variance, I define the gender egalitarianism of any group as the absolute difference between the proportion expressing *strong* disagreement, and those expressing *any* agreement (strong or not) with the traditionalist position. On the basis of the overall distribution of responses just cited, that difference is $22 - (20 + 8)$, which comes to -6. The results displayed in Figure 1 show that this simple indicator reveals substantial class differences.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The first chart shows that employment status and education have both additive and interactive effects on gender egalitarianism. Based on their activity in the week of the survey, women who work are more egalitarian than those who don't, and among working women full-timers are more egalitarian than part-timers. College-educated women are more likely to choose egalitarian answers among all three groups, especially the housewives. The second chart examines only women in paid employment, who are grouped by broad occupational classes similar to those identified in the EGP schema (Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero 1979). If the two working class categories are combined, the women in this sample are distributed fairly equally between the resulting

⁶ Immigrants, students and retired women are excluded. The effective sample size was approximately 800-850.

four broad classes.⁷ Because of this diversity in women's class locations, it matters that their attitudes vary distinctly by class. My results also show the effect of educational differences among white-collar workers. A college education is associated with significantly more egalitarian values, with the size of the education effect rising as we go up the hierarchy of occupational classes.

Although evidence of class differences in the gender ideologies of married mothers is thus quite strong, we cannot be certain which way the causal arrow runs. It is conceivable that women choose their education and employment trajectories in an individualistic manner on the basis of a priori preferences, rather than their outlooks being molded by their class circumstances. This atomistic and voluntaristic view of women's aspirations has been most vigorously advocated by British sociologist Catherine Hakim. In her words, in "rich modern societies" work/family balance is "just one of the lifestyle choices open to ... all social class and income groups" (Hakim 2000:73). I agree with Hakim's two main empirical claims: that women do not all have the same preferences regarding work and family, and that many of them are ambivalent and "adaptive". However, I also agree with critics who have insisted that preferences are constrained by opportunity structures and conditioned by cultural context (e.g. Crompton and Harris 1998; McRae 2003).

In sum, both theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence oblige us to recognize class differences among women in their commitment to gender-equal work and family roles. This in turn raises questions concerning G&M's implicit assumption that their program is appropriate for women as a whole. The implications will be taken up in the concluding section of the paper. At this point our empirical focus moves from orientations and values to political economy. The question is now: who gains and who loses from present arrangements for work/family reconciliation, in comparison with the arrangements that G&M propose?

⁷ Managerial and professional 22%, Semi-professional 28%, Routine non-manual 27%, Working class 24%.

Distributional Effects of Family Policies

The blueprint for reform drawn up by Gornick and Meyers refers to two different types of policy. One of them is government regulation of working hours designed to facilitate more equal parental responsibility. However, I focus here on G&M's proposals for radical innovation in family policy: public provision of free or heavily subsidized childcare and early education, made available to all parents who want it; and the right to various forms of publicly-financed parental leave at high replacement rates, for fathers as well as mothers.

Any policy innovation that would alter the balance between private and public responsibility or redistribute income inevitably implies conflicts of interest between classes. Since G&M's program explicitly includes both of these elements, it acutely raises the question of *cui bono* (who benefits). To answer this question it is necessary to consider two separate issues: the availability and cost of leave and care services under the present market-based system; and how the alternative state-sponsored system would be financed.

In discussing family policy reforms, G&M emphasize that they would entail multiple types of redistribution, including from parents to non-parents and between families with younger and older children (e.g p.14).⁸ Insofar as G&M do discuss the possibility of vertical redistribution between classes, they frame it as a solution to problems of equity and justice. Under America's privatized system, they argue that only "the most privileged families" – those with high incomes and superior job-based parental benefits – have assured access to essential mechanisms of work/family reconciliation (conference paper, p.22). Because "market-based solutions have been calamitous for many American parents and children" (p.141), a public system based on progressive financing is considered essential (see also pp. 139, 144, 232-234).

Perhaps in order to mobilize sympathy for their program, G&M draw attention to the burdens that current American work/family practices place on mothers and families with limited resources, rather than their beneficial consequences for advantaged women and their families, who are presented as a privileged elite. G&M also fail to acknowledge

⁸ Page references refer to Gornick and Meyers (2003).

the radical distributional implications of the mechanisms they propose for financing new family policies. They advocate paying for childcare from general revenues, possibly supplemented by co-payments, while parental leave programs would be paid for by a combination of general and social-security taxes. Clearly then, progressive income taxes would be the major source of revenue. Under current political circumstances, at least, this could be expected to meet resistance from middle-income families. Even stronger opposition would emanate from the rich and their allies, who so successfully led the rollback of progressive taxation (Hacker and Pierson 2005).

What are the distributional implications of the work/family arrangements currently in place? Beginning with parental leave, these policies are of course a far cry from the publicly-financed federal schemes and high replacement rates that G&M advocate. Under prevailing conditions in the US, leave is a discretionary employee benefit that is granted almost exclusively to women. Clearly, employers only have an incentive to finance leave for workers who are difficult or costly to replace. This assures a built-in class bias that G&M are anxious to neutralize by moving to a publicly-financed system (p.139). Supporting their and my assumption of class bias, the most recent available data from the Census Bureau indicate that while a sizeable majority (close to 60%) of first-time mothers with a college degree utilize some form of paid maternity leave, the proportion declines sharply at lower levels of education, reaching only 18% among those without a high school diploma (Johnson and Downs 2005:Table 5).

Richer quantitative evidence is available for childcare patterns. Reports by the Urban Institute, based on large-scale national surveys of families carried out in 1997 and 1999 (Ehrle, Tout and Adams 2001), reveal that for children under three, care arrangements differ substantially between families with higher and lower income (the dividing line was twice the Federal poverty line). Lower-income families and women with low education are primarily dependent on family members to look after infants and toddlers while mothers are at work, whereas the majority of higher-income households and college-educated mothers utilize paid childcare.⁹ Among families with a child under

⁹ Ehrle, Tout and Adams (2001), Figures 5 and 8. The results refer to the primary care arrangement only, and the analysis of income was limited to two-parent families. Parallel findings for the care of older

13 that did purchase care, striking income-based differences are evident (Giannarelli and Barsimantov 2000).

Caution is needed in interpreting unqualified findings like these since comparisons might be complicated by class differences in potentially confounding factors, including family structure (differing rates of fertility and single parenthood), the quantity and quality of care received, and the effects of government aid (Meyers et al. 2004). To deal with some of these issues, I have analyzed the cost of care using a small but high-quality dataset (the National Study of The Changing Workforce in 2002), controlling for women's education and occupation and the presence of a preschool child (Shalev 2006:14-15). I find that the spending patterns of working mothers who are married with children and purchase childcare are closely related to how much they earn. In dollar terms, women in the top earnings quartile spend nearly twice as much on paid care as those in the bottom quartile. But as a proportion of what they earn, the cost is only 14% for high-earning women, compared with 24% for their low-earning counterparts.

These patterns of outlay may exaggerate class differences in the economic burden of childcare by not taking into account selective government aid made available to lower-class households. To properly assess the distributional role of the state it is necessary to address the full range of its interventions: means-tested subsidies, selective preschool programs, and – for families with taxable earnings – tax credits. A recent study by Durfee and Meyers (2006), based on a detailed survey carried out in New York, investigated all three programs. The authors report that fully half of all families with preschool children and working mothers receive some form of assistance, valued at an average of \$4,000 per recipient family. However, notwithstanding the fact that the role of government is apparently far more significant than studies of US family policy have previously acknowledged,¹⁰ there is little evidence that it countervails market-based inequalities. Despite the emphasis on targeting in preschool and subsidy programs, not all of the criteria used are financial and take-up of means-tested programs is far from complete

children (elementary-school age) reveal only small effects of income on the broad types of care utilized (Capizzano, Tout and Adams 2000:Table 2).

¹⁰ It is important to note in this connection that Durfee and Meyers qualify their findings by pointing out that New York has atypically extensive childcare supports.

(Shlay et al. 2004). In addition, tax credits are by nature regressive. As a result, Durfee and Meyers conclude that overall the system is only weakly redistributive, if at all.

To summarize, from a financial perspective higher-class families fare relatively well under the present systems of parental leave and childcare. In contrast, the alternatives advocated by G&M would enlarge the scope of progressive taxation, which is certainly not in the economic interest of the advantaged. The evidence reviewed concerning childcare shows that higher-class parents not only have the means to purchase high-quality substitute care, but they are able to obtain this care by shouldering a smaller economic burden than lower-class parents. An important reason for this is the relatively low cost of private care, due to the ready availability in the United States of low-paid, unqualified and often non-citizen female care workers. However, affordability is not the only factor with a class bias. Parents with advantages also have a strong interest in treating superior childhood care and early education as investments in their children's future ability to reproduce class advantage.

We turn to the third and final substantive concern of this paper, to ask about the probable effects of G&M's policy recommendations on the wages and occupational attainments of working women, and especially how these are likely to differ along class lines.

The Classing of Labor Market Effects

In order to promote convergence in the work and family roles of mothers and fathers, Gornick and Meyers deliberately steer clear of measures which aim only to make it easier for women to perform their traditional roles while attached to the labor market. Instead, they opt for policies designed to encourage parents to equally share both paid work and unpaid care responsibilities. While even Sweden has not implemented such a far-reaching agenda, I believe that much can be learned by treating the Swedish experience with family policy as a counterfactual guide to the likely consequences of adopting G&M's proposals in the US. Two different arguments may be invoked in support of this strategy. One is that G&M may be unduly optimistic concerning the scope for changing men's behavior through social engineering. The most radical dual-carer policy experiment attempted in Sweden, the introduction of earmarked paternal leave for men, has not

succeeded in significantly reducing women's maternal responsibilities and has also run into serious political limits.¹¹ A less controversial justification for regarding Sweden as a valid counterfactual is that even though dual-earning and dual-caring is the ideal embraced by G&M, their work can also be read as a plea to American policymakers to emulate enlightened Nordic policies. My claim is that this would run counter to the interests of those women who have the highest potential labor market attainments.

A growing literature on the effects of family policies, especially in Scandinavia, suggests that measures which facilitate women's employment also exacerbate occupational sex segregation and widen the gender wage gap (e.g. Hakim 2000; Mandel and Semyonov 2005; Mandel and Semyonov 2006). However, in this respect there may be an important difference between the two policy instruments on which this paper focuses. As Estevez-Abe has pointed out, "Statutory leaves and public childcare provision are both intended to promote women's employment. They nonetheless differ on a dimension that is critical for women's human capital development: paid leaves *increase* women's time off work, and extensive childcare provision *reduces* it." (Estevez-Abe 2005:192; emphasis added). Accordingly, provided that it is in synch with parents' work schedules, Estevez-Abe and others consider public childcare to be a gender-neutral policy so far as the labor market is concerned. This is not the case for reconciliation policies that free mothers from work obligations in order to take care of newborn children and meet other family needs. Arrangements that make it easier for them to interrupt their work more frequently than men discourage employers from hiring women. In turn, this discourages women from preparing themselves for careers in which they face strong competition from men.

The purpose of the Sweden-USA comparison which follows is not, however, simply to reiterate that developed work/family reconciliation policies have perverse unintended consequences for women's attainments. Instead, my argument centers once again on class differences. Specifically, I claim that state interventions considered to be mother-friendly have deleterious consequences for the labor market attainments of

¹¹ See Nyberg (2004) for a recent evaluation of the Swedish experiment. Other sources provide indications of the political barriers to extending the current system within Sweden or exporting it to other Scandinavian countries (Ferrarini 2007; Hiilamo and Kangas 2005).

relatively higher-class women, while benefiting relatively lower-class women. Consequently the implicit class conflict between more and less advantaged women which the previous section identified in relation to their interests as consumers of childcare services, also applies to their interests as employees. The remainder of this section seeks to make this case, first by identifying the causal mechanisms involved, and then by comparing actual outcomes in the US and Sweden to see whether they are consistent with theoretical expectations.

When the state intervenes to ease conflicts between women's roles at home and work this makes it possible for them to avoid career tracks which strain their obligations as wives and mothers. The result is that women effectively self-select into lower-paying jobs (Hansen 1995). In contrast, when women lack the cushioning provided by reconciliation policies (including childcare) they come under pressure to adjust their traditional household responsibilities to employer and career demands. In the American context, this adjustment is most readily made by purchasing private child-minding and housework services and outsourcing other domestic tasks. The critical point here is that, for both economic and cultural reasons, the likelihood of such adjustments increases as we go up the class ladder. In contrast, in the Scandinavian context women with a relatively high earnings potential have difficulty purchasing market-based services as substitutes for their unpaid work in the home.¹² The reason is that the Nordic social democracies have been leaders in social protection (decommodification) as well as family policy (defamilialization), and this has impeded the development of a low-wage private service sector (Esping-Andersen 1999). Indeed, despite a rising tide of immigration, Swedish conditions are almost the mirror image of those in the United States, where a largely unregulated and non-union labor market coexists with a sizable supply of socially and politically marginal labor (immigrants and minorities).

At the same time, family policy in Sweden has mainly sought to steer a middle way between gender traditionalism and full-blown defamilialization (Lewis and Astrom 1992; Nyberg 2004). The limits are primarily felt by women in higher class positions. Public daycare cannot meet the needs of those required to work outside standard hours.

¹² Precisely for this reason, the center-right coalition which has held office in Sweden since 2006 favors tax rebates for families that hire private household help.

Mothers are expected and assisted to absent themselves from work when family members are sick or otherwise temporarily in need of care. Parental leave preserves new mothers' jobs and replaces their incomes, but at the cost of missed wage increases and promotions for professional women (www.jusek.se cited by Nyberg 2004:19)

In addition to the effects of work/family reconciliation measures on employer and employee calculations, another factor integral to the Scandinavian welfare state model is the extensive role of the welfare state as an employer (Esping-Andersen 1990; Kolberg 1991). In liberal political economies women are concentrated in private sector services, while in the social-democratic regime they specialize in providing public social services. Socialization of child care – and its cousin, unacknowledged by G&M, socialized elder care – add considerably to the public sector workforce in Scandinavia. This workforce tends to be composed mainly of women, partly as a result of the sex-typing of care occupations, but also because of the public sector's relative friendliness to mothers (Rein 1985; Kolberg and Esping-Andersen 1993). There is actually a double payoff for women with low earnings potential. Not only are they provided jobs that ease work/family conflicts which might otherwise have made it uneconomic for them to work. They also suffer less ~~severe~~ from low pay and gender discrimination in the public than the private sector (Robson et al. 1999). Governments are large, law-abiding and politically sensitive employers. The public sector tends to be unionized and its wages are usually determined in a centralized fashion and administered bureaucratically. The result is a comparatively high wage floor and compressed wage differentials, benefiting women in low-skill care services like minding children and the elderly.

An additional implication of public sector conditions is, however, that earnings ceilings tend to be lower than in the private sector. Consistent with this, a 7-country study by Gornick and Jacobs found that the public sector wage premium declines as income rises (1998:Table 3). In principle this affects both men and women, but the implications depend on the extent to which the sectoral boundary is gendered. Where there is a large public social service sector, as in Sweden, this has supply-side effects that are similar to reconciliation policies. Women – even those with high potential occupational and earnings attainments – are encouraged to opt for working conditions convenient to mothers. Consequently, extended public sectors employ the majority of women working

in managerial and professional occupations. Unaffected by similar considerations, men in these occupations flock to the better-paying heights of the private sector, where it is possible to extract handsome “rents” (Hansen 1997; Rice 1999:25). Once more, the very same conditions that benefit women with lesser skills and in lower class occupations also constrain the likelihood of high-end women competing for the most powerful and lucrative positions.

Not only women workers but also their actual and potential employers are influenced by the family policy environment. Childcare services, joint taxation and other incentives that should be transparent to employers encourage Swedish women to return to work after giving birth. However, this adjustment is also accomplished with the help of arrangements like maternal leave and part-time employment which may be more problematic for women’s careers. Employers can be expected to practice statistical discrimination against women in anticipation of their collective rights to shorter hours and discontinuous employment (Persson and Jonung 1998). To the extent that employer discrimination is based on a rational-economic calculus, it should be most severe in relation to jobs that require the most expertise and responsibility and offer the highest pay. Here we can expect to find the greatest reluctance to hire women, or alternatively, a tendency for employers to compensate themselves by paying women less than men. Following this logic, Albrecht and her colleagues have argued that it is probably because family policy weakens the intensity of women’s work activity, that the gender wage gap in Sweden increases throughout the wage distribution and is widest at the top (Albrecht, Bjorklund and Vroman 2003).

An additional approach to understanding discrimination against women by cost-conscious employers has been suggested in the literature on varieties of capitalism. Employer sensitivity is said to be greatest in “coordinated” economies where employers rely heavily on skills and methods of training that are specific to a particular firm or industry. Women’s lesser commitment to employment continuity makes them especially unattractive to firms anxious to recoup their investments in specific skills training and fearful of losing employees that are hard to replace (Estevez-Abe, Iversen and Soskice 2001). Modifying this expectation from a class perspective, it can be argued that the risks attached to skill *specificity* should be greatest in relation to employees with the highest

skill *level* (Mandel and Shalev 2007). If this is true, Sweden's skills regime may compound the problem of blocked mobility for higher-class women, above and beyond the effects of its family policy regime. In that case, part of the gap between Sweden and the USA in women's attainments in private sector employment may derive from Sweden's specific-skills regime, rather than from the unintended consequences of family policies. I do not believe this is a serious problem, however, since the skill requirements for managers and professionals (where blocked mobility is greatest) are likely to be quite similar across different economies.¹³

Summing up, the effects of both reconciliation policies and the role of the public care services as an employer of women are "classed". Due to mechanisms of self-selection by women workers and statistical discrimination by employers, policies that make it easier for women to combine household responsibilities with paid employment can be expected to have largely benign effects on the careers of lower-class women while indirectly hampering the occupational and earnings mobility of higher-class women. In the Swedish welfare model, social rights for mothers go hand in hand with extensive public social services that are partly the result of the state's defamilialization of child and elder care. The state as an employer tends to pay lower-class workers more generously and higher-class workers less generously than private employers. It follows that G&M's proposal for families' care needs to be serviced by the state, and some of the reconciliation policies which they advocate, would most probably undermine the labor market attainments of higher-class women if they were introduced in the United States.

I now present selected empirical data which verifies that the occupational and wage attainments of women in the US and Sweden are conditional on class position. The results are consistent with my claim that under Swedish conditions, American women in higher classes would likely be worse off, and in lower classes better off. Rather than

¹³ VOC theory focuses on the overall direction favored by systems of skill formation (general vs. specific skills), but typical human capital requirements also vary between different levels of the job structure irrespective of the skills regime. In all varieties of capitalism, requirements for on-the-job training (OJT) are especially stringent in the higher (professional and managerial) class, which comprises occupations characterized by a high degree of *task specificity* (Polavieja 2005). Even in the United States, a liberal economy in which employers are said to rely predominantly on general skills, it has been shown that women's limited participation in OJT explains much of their exclusion from highly-paid jobs (Tomaskovic Devey and Skaggs 2002).

comparing the entire class structure, the analysis is based on two occupational classes – managers at the top, and "menial services workers" at the bottom. The latter category has been described as the post-industrial working class (Esping-Andersen 1993), encompassing unskilled and semiskilled work in sales, care work, cleanup, food and entertainment. The selection of only two class categories was partly dictated by the need to ensure cross-country comparability, but it also has a theoretical rationale. These two classes represent different patterns of women's labor market integration as well as different poles of the contemporary class structure. The first is the home ground of the glass ceiling, while the second encompasses the lower reaches of the feminized service sector.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The first thing we learn from Table 1 is that there is a substantial difference in class structure between the two countries. For the age group considered here (25-55), the managerial class is twice as large in the US than Sweden. At the same time, reflecting the magnitude of the paid caregiving sector the menial services class is considerably larger in Sweden.¹⁴ Women have indeed been notably successful in competing with men for jobs in America's ample managerial class.¹⁵ Not only is the proportion of managers who are women lower in Sweden, but far more of them (nearly half) owe their positions to the public sector. When the hourly earnings of managers are divided into tertiles (thirds), women in both countries are much more likely to be found at the bottom than the top – an indication of the glass ceiling effect. However, women's crowding at the bottom of the managerial wage structure and their exclusion from the top are both significantly lower in the US. These findings support my expectation that advantaged women in Sweden would have more difficulty competing with men for high-class and highly-paid positions. The public sector eases this difficulty in relation to occupational attainment, but not in relation to wage attainment. Swedish women managers who work in the private sector earn a lot

¹⁴ Had this analysis included workers under 25, the US menial services class would have grown due to the many young people employed in the "food and fun" sector.

¹⁵ The present estimate of the difference between the two countries may be conservative. Using somewhat different procedures, including controlling at the individual level for cross-national differences in workforce composition, Mandel and Semyonov (2006:Fig.6) find that women's probability of having a managerial occupation compared with men's is more than 80% greater in the USA than Sweden.

more than their public sector counterparts (10 percentiles, in terms of the overall earnings structure).

Turning to the menial services class, as expected it is highly feminized in both countries.¹⁶ However, judging by their wages, the economic position of working class women in the services differs dramatically between the two countries. Whereas in Sweden they are distributed equally between the three wage tertiles of their class, in the US they are a lot more likely to be found in the bottom tertile than the top. The effects of this difference are amplified by the massive wage differential between high and low-earning menial services workers in the USA – more than 3:1, compared to near-equality in Sweden. Moreover, not only inequality within but also between classes is far milder in Sweden.¹⁷ It is reasonable to infer that many of these positive outcomes for Swedish menial women are the result of their high concentration in the public sector. Table 2 shows that in both countries, public employment enhances women's earnings in the menial services class. However, because of private sector domination relatively few American women benefit from this sectoral effect.

Clearly, many of the advantages enjoyed by lower-class women and barriers to the attainments of higher-class women in Sweden derive from wage-setting institutions and social policies that promote class equality and earnings compression rather than from work/family policies. However, by measuring women's representation in both the class and intraclass hierarchies, I have sought to isolate gender inequality per se from the effects of the underlying wage structure.¹⁸ The results suggest that Swedish women have a harder time entering elite positions and are hemmed in by a lower glass ceiling, especially in the public sector. In contrast, their lower-class compatriots in the services enjoy intraclass gender equality and most of them benefit from a sizable bonus by dint of working for local or central government. Neither of these conditions apply to American

¹⁶ Nevertheless, at 71% the proportion of menial service workers who are women is lower in the US than the 11 other countries analyzed by Mandel and myself (Mandel and Shalev 2006). One reason for this is the role of minority men. Nonwhite men are three times more likely than white men to work as menial service workers in the United States.

¹⁷ A calculation not reported in Table 2 indicates that, at the median, the ratio between the wages of managers and menials is 2.2 in the USA and 1.6 in Sweden.

¹⁸ A similar analytical strategy, inspired by the work of Blau and Kahn (1992), has been adopted by Gornick (1999), Mandel and Semyonov (2005) and Mandel and Shalev (2006). Needless to say, however, gender is to some extent endogenous to both class structure and class inequality.

Class and Moral Economy. G&M seek to transcend traditional work/family reconciliation measures by packaging them with more radical policies aimed at equalizing the domestic division of labor. The findings presented in the first section of this paper suggest that traditional policies may represent the upper limit of what many lower-class women would support. Indeed, they may well prefer even more conservative policies, such as paying mothers to care for their own children or supporting a “1½ earner” model. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that the women most in need of the proposed reforms would react with enthusiasm if they appeared on the political agenda.

G&M downplay this apparent contradiction. Instead, they focus on the injustice of current policies towards less affluent families and strive to legitimate their reform proposals by emphasizing how much they would improve the welfare of needy mothers and their children. But do G&M have the right to ignore conflicts between their program and what lower-class women may actually want?¹⁹ Their own justification seems to be that the opinions held by these women are essentially adaptations to constrained opportunity structures. Socialization along traditionalist lines, pressure from male partners and limited career opportunities indeed make it understandable why women of humble origins may be more predisposed towards the traditional household division of labor and find little attraction in paid work. I have already suggested, however, that while moral economy and political economy are mutually selecting and reinforcing, they are also at least partly autonomous. As Sayer puts it, “normative rationales... matter greatly to actors, as they are implicated in their commitments, identities and ways of life” (Sayer 2004:3). Moreover, as Uhlmann (2004) has forcefully argued, when sociologists explain away the alien (to them) norms of working class families as responses to disadvantage, they may be guilty of imposing their own habitus and worldview.

Class and Childcare. For G&M, the regressive distributional consequences of market-based childcare constitute a glaring inequity that policy should address by assuring quality care for all children and spreading the costs widely. They gloss over the

¹⁹ This is not the place to enter into the ethical aspects of the problem. Suffice it to say that it would not be difficult for advocates of progressive family policy to argue that, for example, the importance of economic autonomy for the wellbeing of lower-class women justifies such policies even if the beneficiaries do not demand them.

their spouses declined. But under these circumstances, families with taxable earnings would be most likely to follow the predictions of path-dependency theorists and demand increased tax relief rather than a change in the system.

Class and the Labor Market. Work/family reconciliation policies, and the expansion of sheltered public sector employment which they generate, may be essential for "weak" women to combine motherhood with paid work. But they undermine the potential labor market attainments of "strong" women by crowding them into feminized enclaves and fuelling statistical discrimination by private employers. In developing counterfactual predictions for the United States based on the Swedish experience, I have already conceded that not all of the relative disadvantage of Swedish women at the higher end of the class structure can reasonably be attributed to the ripple effects of family policies. Some may be due to the different skill regimes that characterize the two countries, which may have made private sector firms in the US more amenable to recruiting women into high-level positions. Another difference between the two countries which has arguably worked in favor of American women's entry into managerial and professional jobs is the role of legislation and state regulation in promoting equal opportunity for women (Orloff 2006; Zippel, this volume). Chang (2000) argues that North American states have prioritized this type of "equal access intervention" over the "substantive" interventions (reconciliation policies) favored in Scandinavia, and that this has been consequential for the rate of sex desegregation of elite occupations.

Notwithstanding these and other potentially confounding features of the American context, it is fair to conclude that adoption of the Swedish family policy regime would be at odds with the interests of advantaged women. Inversely, the benefits of Swedish policies for disadvantaged women would clearly be amplified by the weakness of lower-class workers in America's highly commodified labor market. Public childcare, rights to parental leave and other forms of paid time off for care, and the transfer of child and other care-work to the public sector would greatly curtail the current negative interplay between lower-class women's dual vulnerabilities as mothers and workers. In turn, shrinkage of the female and low-wage segment of the workforce would undermine the

market-based modes of defamilialization that are currently so important for easing the work/family conflicts that face higher-class women.

Are members of the latter group aware of and concerned by these potential threats to their relatively privileged position? It is not necessary to assume that they are in order to conclude that their class interests nevertheless form a resilient barrier to the realization of G&M's vision. Both higher-class women and the pressure groups which they dominate favor liberal feminism and its sibling, liberal political economy (White 2006).²⁰ They do so for good reason: both resonate well with their life experiences. It is true that, as critics point out, the status quo imposes tough choices between motherhood and career and makes heavy demands on the time and energy of those who opt for both. Nevertheless, middle and upper-class women are able to navigate the status quo by purchasing marketized care and housekeeping services, sometimes with government subsidies; by utilizing supports for mothers' employment offered by self-interested employers; by taking advantage of America's higher education system (where money talks much louder than gender); and by benefiting from institutionalized state and corporate guarantees of equal opportunity at work. In short, advantaged women have good reason to preemptively forfeit social rights earmarked for mothers and to avoid compromising on lower-paid but mother-friendly public sector jobs. Nevertheless, an important caveat should be entered here, in the form of a cleavage which this essay has largely ignored – race. College-educated African-American women appear to be far more reliant on the public sector for opportunities to enter managerial and professional occupations (Collins 1983; Hsieh and Winslow 2006; Newsome and Doodoo 2002), suggesting the hypothesis that whiteness may be an implicit condition for women to pursue the market-based route to emulating male success.

The interests of advantaged women will not necessarily and always prevent at least some of them from joining coalitions with women from less advantaged classes in support of family policy reform. That depends to a great extent on politics, but comparative studies suggest that the political opportunity structure in the United States is

²⁰ From White's account it appears that major women's groups, including the National Organization for Women, have been conscious of the threat that protective labor legislation and differential treatment for women would pose to the upward mobility of more advantaged women, and have consequently opposed measures like paid maternity leave.

relatively unfavorable to such a scenario (Mazur 2003; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Korpi 2000). In Scandinavia, the combination of powerful unions, governing social-democratic parties and strong states encouraged the development of cross-class coalitions of women. Solidaristic trade unions integrated their growing female membership by "adopting policies that benefited women in the same way as they benefited all low-paid workers" (Ruggie 1987:248), and also by acting as trail-blazers, introducing gender-equality policies through collective agreements before they ever reached the legislative arena (Whitehouse 1992). In parallel, a common interest in big government developed between social-democratic governments and women employed as social service workers (Huber and Stephens 2000). In contrast, in the US decentralization and fragmentation of both organized labor and the state have favored an "individualistic legalistic approach" that has yielded significant victories, but primarily "at the upper end of the occupational spectrum" (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999:104).

To conclude, class interests and the character of class and gender politics stand in the way of moving the United States towards a radically different set of employment and family policies. True, political economy is not everything. Current literature acknowledges a much greater role than conceded hitherto for the role of new ideas in bringing about radical changes in policy (Blyth 1997), and this is of course the motivation for Gornick and Meyers' tireless promotion of their utopian vision. Nevertheless, they have also taken on the challenge of infusing political plausibility into their program. *Families that Work* cogently defends it against a variety of obstacles which are often said to prevent European-style policies being adopted in the United States, including labor market structure, political institutions and culture, demography and diversity. The factor which is conspicuously missing from this list, although it is connected to several of those that do get attention, is the difficulty of constructing a cross-class coalition – first and foremost of women – in favor of their proposals. I have sought to argue that the opposing forces are very strong indeed.

Table 1

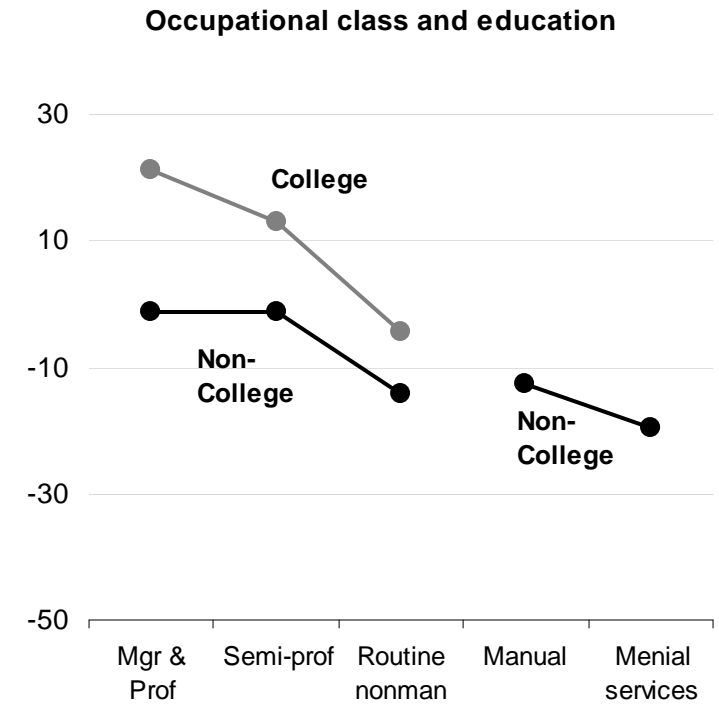
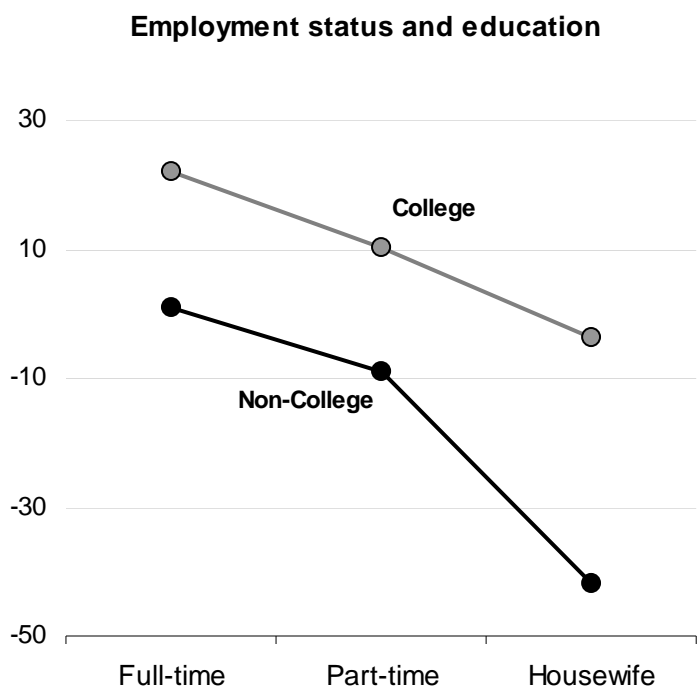
Comparison of two occupational classes in Sweden & USA

	Managers		Menial service workers	
	USA	Sweden	USA	Sweden
Class as percent of all employees	10	5	10	16
% of class who are women	43	35	71	81
% of top wage tertile who are women	22	15	28	33
% of bottom wage tertile who are women	43	52	38	33
Wage differential within class (tertile ratio)	2.6	2.3	3.1	1.3
<i>Women only:</i>				
% in public sector	17	46	13	71
Public-Private differential (percentiles)	0	-10	+6	+7

Notes: Author's calculations from 2001 CPS (USA) and 2000 LNU (Sweden). Wage-earners aged 25-55 only. Wage calculations based on gross hourly earnings. Effective sample size for USA >4,000; for Sweden, n=119 managers and 362 menials. Definitions of classes and other details are reported in Mandel and Shalev (2006).

Figure 1

Effects of employment status and class on gender egalitarianism in the USA
(GSS, 1994-2004)



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